

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

November 30, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

Shortly after Hamas terrorists infiltrated Israel on October 7th murdering innocent Israeli civilians and taking more than 240 hostages, you flew to Tel Aviv to stand with the Israeli people. Your moral clarity comparing Hamas' atrocities to those carried out by ISIS was critical in explaining to the world that, "Now, this is no time for neutrality, or for false equivalence, or for excuses for the inexcusable."

Hamas, who have oppressed the people of Gaza for years, are using innocent civilians as human shields in a war Hamas started, leading to tragically high civilian casualties. While Israel rightly adheres to international norms and the laws of armed conflict in carrying out operations against Hamas, it is Hamas' reprehensible tactics that impose a terrible toll.

Across the globe, the United States fulfills a crucial role in providing humanitarian aid and life-saving support during conflict and crisis. To that end, we urge you to consider deploying the United States hospital ships USNS Mercy and USNS Comfort, or other medical-capable ships, to the waters off Gaza to help provide civilians access to emergency medical care. The United States, working with Egypt and Israel together, has the capability to undermine Hamas' strategy to increase and prolong human suffering. The deployment should occur in full coordination with the Israeli and Egyptian governments and last for the duration of active operations in the current Gaza conflict. Such a deployment is especially important due to Hamas' illegal use of hospitals and other civilian locations as military outposts, in flagrant violation of the laws of war.


For decades, the US Navy's Military Sealift Command has provided mobile medical facilities to support our disaster relief and humanitarian operations across the world. Additionally, many other US Navy ships – some currently present in the region – have operating rooms, pharmacies, and other relevant facilities. Hamas' actions maximize civilian casualties while simultaneously minimizing access to medical facilities. Thus, we urge you to consider deploying some of these assets towards humanitarian assistance – to save civilian lives, reduce the burden on Israel's and Egypt's medical infrastructure, and counter Hamas' disregard for the laws of war and human suffering.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Bradley Scott Schneider
Member of Congress



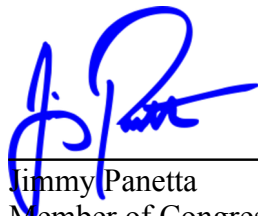
Robert B. Aderholt
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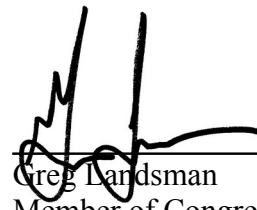
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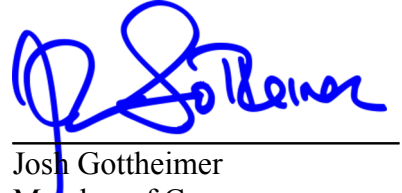
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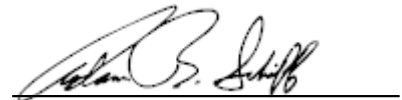
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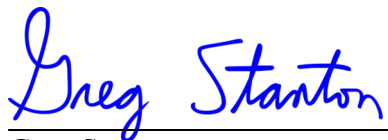
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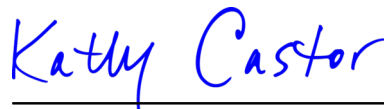
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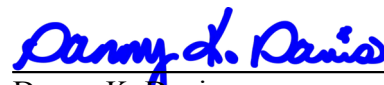
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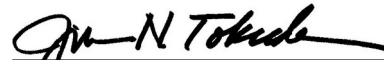
Bonnie Watson Coleman
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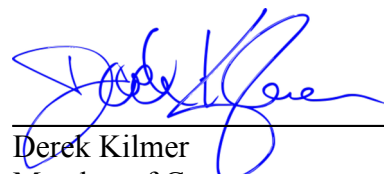
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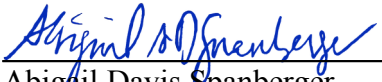
Donald M. Payne, Jr.
Member of Congress



George Santos
Member of Congress



Glenn Ivey
Member of Congress



Abigail Davis Spanberger
Member of Congress

CC: The Honorable Antony Blinken, U.S. Secretary of State